

An investigation of a multimedia language lab project in Turkish state universities

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Abstract. This paper reports on a nation-wide study designed to investigate the use of Multimedia Language Labs (MLLs) and the attitudes of students toward MLLs at tertiary level. The study will also explore the factors affecting students' attitudes towards MLLs. In an attempt to catch up with the technology, many institutions have invested in MLLs and included them in their curricula. In the same vein, in 2012, the Council of Higher Education in Turkey equipped all state universities with MLLs. Since they are new in Turkey and they have many differences from traditional labs available in almost all of the schools of foreign languages, a nation-wide study is needed to explore how they are perceived by students. The purpose of this study is to investigate, a) the attitudes of students towards MLLs, and b) the factors affecting students' attitudes towards MLLs. Questionnaires were used as a data collection instrument. Since this is the first research conducted on MLLs in Turkey, it has the potentiality of taking a snapshot of a country in terms of the current use of these labs. This study also reveals suggestions for material designers.

Keywords: multimedia language lab, classroom technologies, TELL, CALL, EFL.

1. Introduction

Technology influences many aspects of our lives, language learning included. It has an undeniable impact on almost all aspects of language education by providing many opportunities to support language teaching and learning. In recent years, computers in particular have been regarded as one of the prominent technological instruments and they have played a crucial role in English language teaching. The twenty-first century has provided Computer-Assisted Language

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Learning (CALL) with many opportunities to benefit from; in other words, CALL has utilized from each technological advance for the delivery of CALL (Beatty, 2010). Many institutions provide their students with the opportunity to make use of language labs, which became popular in secondary schools and other institutions in the late 1960s and early 1970s (Davies, Bangs, Frisby, & Walton, 2005). Thanks to new technological developments, language labs have turned into MLLs designed with special software and have become an aid for the language teacher to enhance teaching and learning. These MLLs enable a teacher to monitor and control student computers in or outside the classroom and differ from older analogue language labs in several key aspects such as in nature and functionality, and also in terms of what they require from the teacher (Vanderplank, 2010). As many institutions see their benefits, also in an attempt to keep up with technological development, they have invested in these up-to-date labs and included them in their curricula. With the same purpose, in 2012, the Council of Higher Education in Turkey equipped all state universities with MLLs.

In these labs, the most common practices are listening comprehension, discussion, model imitation, and subtitling activities. Since these labs are not 'self-access' centers, the teacher should be there to initiate the activities and evaluate the students' performances in addition to giving immediate feedback to them. As these labs are new to Turkey and there is little large-scale research available, it is hoped that this study will contribute to filling the gap in large-scale studies on the use of MLLs, since most published research consists of small-scale studies.

2. Method

2.1. Setting and participants

This study was conducted in fourteen different state universities where MLLs are used throughout Turkey. These fourteen institutions are in five different regions of Turkey. 510 students participated in the study. All of the students who were included in the study were preparatory class students with different proficiency levels of English and studying in the school of foreign languages in these universities (see Table 1). In any one institution, not all classes using MLLs for language teaching purposes were necessarily surveyed. In any institution, if there were more than one class where MLLs were integrated into the weekly schedule, the class in which the MLL had been used most often or for the longest time was surveyed. If the students from different classes had the same degree of MLL experience, one sample class was chosen at random.

Table 1. Background information of students

Regions of Institutions			Level of English Proficiency			MLL Exposure		
f %			f %			f %		
Aegean	65	13	Elementary	45	9	1-2 Hours	387	76
Marmara	73	14	Pre-Intermediate	296	58	3-5 Hours	79	15
Mediterranean	55	11	Intermediate	112	22	6-Above	44	9
Central Anatolian	163	32	Upper-Intermediate	32	6			
Black Sea	154	30	Advanced	25	5			
Total	510	100.00	Total	510	100.00	Total	510	100.00

Note: f: Frequency; %: percentage

2.2. Data collection

A student questionnaire was administered in this study in order to collect data about the attitudes of students towards MLLs at Turkish state universities and to reveal the factors affecting their attitudes towards MLLs (see [Appendix](#)). The questionnaire included five-point Likert-scale questions, with responses ranging from “Strongly Agree” (5) to “Strongly Disagree” (1), as well as open ended and multiple choice items. The first part of the student questionnaire aimed to collect data about the students’ backgrounds. In the second part, the students were expected to answer 21 items about their attitudes towards MLLs in language learning.

2.3. Data analysis

The researcher analyzed all items, except for the open-ended questions at the end of the questionnaires, using descriptive statistics in the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 20. The open-ended responses from the students were categorized as positive or negative statements according to the sections in the analysis of the questionnaire data.

3. Results and discussion

The second section of the questionnaire consists of four parts. In the first part, the items were aimed to explore students’ attitudes towards the use of MLLs in terms of their effect on learning. By considering the highest mean score ($M=4.19$) in this section, we can understand that most of the students believe that their learning is promoted by the audio and visual materials in MLLs. Also, four fifths of the students believe that MLLs provide a great variety of resources for them and also think that MLLs have the potentiality of making lessons more interesting and

exciting. Also, a large majority (83%) of the participants think that studying in MLLs helps them learn more.

In the second part, items were aimed to explore the students' attitudes towards MLLs in terms of technical issues. The purpose was to explore whether some technical breakdowns (such as broken headphones and microphones) hinder their motivation in the MLLs and to reveal the frequency of technical breakdowns. A large majority of the respondents think that the frequency of the breakdowns in MLLs is high. More than half of the students (65%) agreed that these breakdowns decrease their motivation. Considering this fact, either the teachers should have the capacity to handle these kinds of problems right away, or the project owner should provide the universities with immediate technical support.

In the third part, the items were related to the students' feelings about the use of MLLs in English classes. A large majority (84%) of the respondents like using the computers in MLLs. In parallel with this result, as the second highest mean score ($M=3.94$) elicits, the students' preference is the lessons that are taught in the MLLs rather than in class. For the open-ended questions, 56 of the respondents wrote that thanks to the software installed in the MLLs, they all felt like in the process of learning interactively, which is something they said they did not feel in the classroom. In the light of these results in this section, it can be inferred that the students should be provided with a variety of instruction methods in order to engage them in the class.

In the final part of the questionnaire, there are items aiming to explore students' attitudes towards MLLs in terms of motivational issues. These issues were about the students' concentration level, their participation and their attention spans during the lessons in the MLLs. A majority (77%) of the respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with the idea that MLLs increase their concentration span. Since they feel more concentrated in the MLLs, they (73%) think that they participate in the lessons more as well. In the open-ended section, 23 students stated that they felt like the lessons were always student-centered and they never fell behind the process in the MLLs. From this last statement, we can infer one of the prominent advantages of technology, which is the potentiality that enables students to easily recap the topics that have just been taught in the class.

4. Conclusions

Overall, from these results, it can be inferred that the students, who are digital natives as well, get along with the technology very well. If given the opportunity

and provided with the right equipment with the right purposes, the students can take a great step on the path through language proficiency. However, teachers should also be aware of the potentiality of the MLLs and make the most of them in the aim of presenting a variety of instruction to increase their students’ motivation.

Almost all of the educational institutions have invested or are finding ways to invest in technological tools and integrate them in their curricula. With the same purpose, the Council of Higher Education in Turkey have made an attempt to meet the expectations of the digital natives studying at universities.

By offering insights about the effective use of MLLs and by revealing more about the attitudes of all the students studying at English classes, this study is expected to contribute to language instruction practices at tertiary level. Also, curriculum designers should be aware of the potential benefits or limitations of MLLs.

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Appendix

Please check the best option you think					
	Strongly Agree	Agree	No Idea	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I learn more when we study in MLLs.					

It is easier to understand the lesson when we study in MLLs.					
Computer is not different from the book from the point of my learning English.					
Audio and visual materials we use in MLLs helps me understand the lesson better.					
I find the opportunity to learn from different sources with the help of MLLs.)					
Technical problems (broken headphones and microphones) which I encounter in the LAB decreases my motivation.					
Computers in MLLs often break down.					
I like using the computers in MLLs.					
It seems difficult for me to use the computers in MLLs.					
I prefer lessons that are taught in MLLs.					
It makes me uncomfortable when my work is shown to the whole class with the system in the MLLs.					
I concentrate better when my teacher teach in the MLLs.					
I participate in lessons more when my teacher teach in the MLLs.					
MLLs make learning more interesting and exciting.					
It is easier to keep my attention when we study in MLLs.					
MLLs make it easier for me to be motivated during the lesson.					
When my teacher teaches in MLLs, I cannot keep up with the lesson because the pace of the lesson is much faster.					
The lessons become more organized in MLLs.					
MLLs saves time.					
There is no difference between my teacher's teaching techniques and methods in traditional class and MLLs.					
I think there is not much difference between my learning in MLLs and traditional class.					

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